PATTERNS OF POWER

What the Ruled Can Move

On how durable hierarchies end

A synthesis across the cases

A case study in the Patterns of Power series

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Held as tested, not revealed

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PART ONE

THE PROPOSITION, AND ITS QUALIFIERS

The claim this paper examines is usually stated too broadly, and stated too broadly it is both offensive and false. It is worth getting the wording right before looking at the evidence, because almost every objection to it is an objection to a version nobody should be defending.

The claim is not that ordinary people are passive, that grievance is irrelevant, or that popular movements achieve nothing. Every case in this collection contains people who resisted at enormous cost, and in several the resistance is the most impressive thing in the record.

The claim is this: a hierarchy that holds a working monopoly of organised force is not dislodged by the people it rules, because the disparity in organised violence is total and no accumulation of grievance closes it. Structural change therefore requires that something happen to the party holding the force — a fracture, an exhaustion, a conquest, or a recalculation. The ruled are present at every one of those events, frequently as the soldiers and almost always as the dead, but they are not the agent that opens the crack.

Each word in the qualifier does work, and the cases show why.

Working. An apparatus that has stopped paying its soldiers, or whose officers have divided, is not a floor. Half of what looks like a successful rising in the historical record is a rising against something that had already ceased to function.

Monopoly. Where a rival power arms the subject population to parity, the disparity is no longer total and the claim no longer applies in its strong form. This is not a small exception and Part Seven takes it seriously.

Organised force. Not legitimacy, not consent, not popularity. Orders survive being widely hated for centuries. What they do not survive is their own coordinating class deciding the arrangement no longer pays.

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PART TWO

WHAT ACTUALLY BROKE

Set the endings side by side and the first thing that emerges is how rarely the ending looks like the story usually told about it.

French Algeria was militarily unbeaten when it fell. The FLN's units had been broken in the field; the army held the country. What ended the order was that the metropole's will emptied of a cost it could still bear but chose not to, and the settler-army bloc then fractured from the state over the choice. An order can win every engagement and lose the colony, and this one did.

British Northern Nigeria's floor was never broken either. It was *priced.* The credibility of Britain's reach died at Port Said in November 1956, when a foreign treasury proved it could stop a British army without firing a shot, and the reach was formally written off in a Cabinet committee eleven weeks later, in a document that amounted to a profit and loss account by colony. A Hausa farmer's cost column in 1955 was underwritten by a force four thousand miles away, and it emptied because of a canal in Egypt and a bond position in Washington.

British Jamaica produces the sharpest variant, and it corrects the others. The metropole's will did not empty. The people holding it were replaced. The Reform Act of 1832 abolished fifty-six boroughs, including many of the seats the West India interest had sat on, and the Parliament that abolished slavery the following year was not the Parliament of 1830 having changed its mind — it was a different Parliament, constituted by a statute passed for reasons that had nothing to do with Jamaica. An order resting on a bloc of votes in a distant assembly can be destroyed by a redistricting.

Buganda shows the same instrument giving opposite results, and the pairing is as clean as this collection gets. Article 6 of the Agreement of 1900 let the Protectorate depose a kabaka. It was used against Kagwa in 1926, when the metropolitan will was firm, and it worked. It was used against Mutesa in 1953, when the will had emptied, and it broke — the deposition produced a mass movement that returned him and eventually ended the order. Not a word of the clause changed between the two.

Russian and Soviet Turkestan supplies four endings on one territory and none of them opened from below. The rising of 1916 met an intact floor and produced further expropriation. The collapse of 1917 was an exhaustion that happened in Galicia. The famine of 1930–33 killed something on the order of two-fifths of a nation and produced no rising at all. And 1991 was a repricing at the centre, in a union Central Asia had voted overwhelmingly to remain in. The same people rose in 1916 and were destroyed, and did nothing in 1917 and were rid of the same government.

The Viceroyalty of Peru lost its floor when Napoleon deposed the Spanish king at Bayonne in 1808 — a conquest of the metropole, executed in a French border town by people who had never seen America. And the case then contradicts the easy reading, because Peru's creoles did *not* separate when the floor vanished. They spent sixteen years as the royalist bastion of South America and were conquered from outside in 1824, by armies from Buenos Aires and Caracas.

The American South had its floor withdrawn twice over, and the dates matter. Not in 1877, when a few hundred men left two statehouses, but in 1865 and 1866, when an army of a million was demobilised to a national total of forty-three thousand for reasons the President stated publicly in dollars. Everything Congress legislated afterwards was written to be executed by a force that had already gone home.

Across the set, the endings sort into: metropolitan will exhausted (Algeria, Northern Nigeria, most of the European empires); the holders of the will replaced by a franchise change (Jamaica); conquest of the metropole (Peru); conquest by a rival fragment of the same order (Spanish America generally); and fiscal decision at the centre (the American South, the Soviet Union). Not one of them is the governed defeating an intact, backed floor.

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PART THREE

THE TWO COLUMNS

Here is the finding I think the cases actually support, and it is more specific and more useful than the general proposition.

Any party holding an order keeps something like a ledger. On one side is what the arrangement returns him — revenue, labour, land, seats, prestige, strategic depth. On the other is what it costs him — garrisons, subsidies, administration, attention, and the recurring political price of whatever has to be done each year to keep it.

The ruled can move the cost column. They cannot move the benefit column.

A rising raises the price of holding. It burns the crop, kills the officials, requires a deployment, produces an inquiry, embarrasses the government, and forces the men at the centre to decide again, this year, whether they still want to pay. That is genuine leverage and it is exercised constantly across these cases.

What a rising cannot do is create a reason to hold or destroy one. The return on Algeria was set by oil, by the pieds-noirs' votes, by the army's honour and by France's estimate of its own standing. The return on Northern Nigeria was set in Whitehall by comparing it against other claims on a strained treasury. The return on the American South after 1868 was set by whether the Republican coalition still needed southern electoral votes, and by whether the West offered a better yield on the same dollar. None of those was within reach of anyone in Algeria, Kano or Mississippi.

Which produces the pattern that runs through the whole corpus: a rising succeeds only when the benefit column has independently fallen, and fails whenever it has not — regardless of the rising's scale, courage, organisation or justice.

The failures are the proof, and they are not marginal cases.

Túpac Amaru II raised tens of thousands in 1780, held the Andes for months, had dynastic legitimacy, wealth, literacy, both languages and a coherent programme, and had exhausted the lawful route first. He was destroyed and quartered in the square at Cuzco. The Bourbons then abolished the reparto and the corregidores — every item on his list — through their own existing administrative programme, drafted by men who had wanted those reforms already. He repriced. He authored nothing.

The Central Asian rising of 1916 was answered with further expropriation.

Ida B. Wells published better evidence, in more detail, with more corroboration, than the Congressional committee of 1871 had gathered — and the committee's evidence produced federal prosecutions that destroyed the Klan, and hers produced nothing at all. Same country, same channel, twenty years apart.

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PART FOUR

THE SAME RISING, THE OTHER BALANCE SHEET

The cleanest way to see this is to hold the rising constant and change the ledger.

Jamaica supplies the pair. Tacky's revolt in 1760 and Sam Sharpe's in 1831 were both crushed, and both crushed easily. What differed was who received the invoice. In 1760 the bill went to a Parliament in which the West India interest held seats and the arrangement was earning. In 1831 it went to a Parliament about to be reconstituted by the Reform Act, in a country where the sugar colonies' return had been falling for decades and an abolition movement had captured the metropolitan public. The same rising, seventy years earlier, buys nothing. That is not a diminishment of Sharpe, who planned a strike at the mill in crop time rather than a war and understood his leverage better than most of his historians have.

Turkestan supplies a pair with the variable reversed. The same population rose in 1916 against a floor that held, and was destroyed. It did nothing in 1917, and the government that had destroyed it collapsed anyway, for reasons four thousand miles west. Action against an intact floor: annihilation. Inaction while the floor cracked elsewhere: liberation. Nothing about the population's courage or organisation explains the difference.

And the American case supplies the pair across the longest interval in the corpus. In 1871 Congress took eight thousand pages of sworn testimony about Klan violence, and it produced suspension of habeas corpus, mass arrests and the destruction of the organisation. In 1892 and after, the same kind of evidence, better compiled, produced two hundred failed bills across fifty years. In 1963 photographs from Birmingham produced a Civil Rights Act within thirteen months.

The evidence did not improve between 1892 and 1963. What changed was that by 1963 the United States was one of two world powers competing for the alignment of several dozen newly independent non-white states, and its own Secretary of State had told the President's Committee in writing that the arrangement was a source of constant embarrassment in the day-to-day conduct of foreign relations. The bill had a payer.

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PART FIVE

FIVE WAYS A POSITION CHANGES

If the ledger is what matters, then the useful question is not *what are the ways an order breaks* but *what are the ways a ledger moves.* The cases give five, and they are worth separating because they behave differently and have different warning signs.

One — the return falls. The colony stops paying, or something else starts paying better. Northern Nigeria against a strained postwar treasury; Louisiana against the Plains in 1876; Jamaica's sugar against free-trade sugar after 1846. This is the commonest ending in the modern era and it is usually invisible until it is complete, because a declining return produces no event.

Two — the cost rises past the return. Algeria after 1954; the American South's annual autumnal outbreaks, which Grant named exactly when he declined to send troops to Mississippi in 1875 — the whole public tired out with them. An annual recurring obligation with no end state is the most expensive thing a metropole can carry, and it is the first thing an electorate stops paying for. This is the column risings actually operate on.

Three — the payer is replaced. Jamaica in 1832. This is the mechanism the corpus nearly missed and it deserves standing: the ledger does not move, the person holding it is exchanged for someone with a different one. Look for it wherever an order rests on a bloc of votes, a court faction, a party's internal balance, or a dynasty's succession — all of which can be reconstituted without anybody being persuaded of anything.

Four — a new audience acquires a claim. The United States after 1945. The order had cost the national apex nothing for sixty years because the people it cost could not present a bill. Then the country acquired a global competition in which its internal arrangements were an asset or a liability, and a rival with every incentive to itemise them. The arrangement had not changed. The set of parties entitled to send an invoice had. I think this is the most underweighted mechanism in the collection, and it is not confined to the Cold War: the Spanish Crown held the Indies under a papal grant conditional on evangelisation, which gave a theological audience with institutional addresses a standing claim, and Charles V suspended the conquests in 1550 to hold a hearing on it.

Five — the holder is removed by force from outside. Peru in 1808. Vietnam in 1945, when a rival empire dismantled the French floor in a night. This is the only one of the five in which the ruled's own strength is genuinely irrelevant, and it is also the one that most often gets misremembered afterwards as a liberation achieved from below.

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PART SIX

WORDS ARE A STANDING OPTION

One consequence of all this concerns written guarantees, and it cuts against both of the obvious readings.

The Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution provided from 1870 that the right of citizens to vote should not be denied or abridged on account of race. In 1964, ninety-four years later, Black registration in Mississippi stood at about 6.7 per cent of the voting-age Black population. Three years after the Voting Rights Act of 1965 it was around sixty.

Not one word of the Amendment had changed. What arrived in 1965 was an apparatus: a coverage formula that captured the covered states automatically, federal examiners who could register voters over the heads of the local registrar, federal observers at the polls, and a requirement that covered jurisdictions obtain permission in Washington before altering any voting practice at all.

The distinction that draws is worth stating flatly. A right is a claim. A floor is an apparatus. A constitution can contain the first for a century without producing the second. The Fifteenth Amendment did not fail because it was badly drafted or because judges were sophistical. It failed because for ninety-five years nobody with organised force needed it enforced, and it succeeded when somebody did.

Buganda's Article 6 makes the same point from the opposite direction — the same clause, firm will, worked; emptied will, broke — and so does the Granada capitulation of 1491, which guaranteed the Muslims of the city their religion, their law, their mosques and their property *para siempre jamás*, for ever and ever, and was nullified within eleven years.

But the cynical conclusion is wrong, and the American case is the one that refutes it. Words written down outlive the interests that wrote them, and can be picked up later by parties the drafters never imagined. The Reconstruction amendments were written by a faction pursuing a factional interest — the Radical Republicans needed southern Republican votes against a South whose representation emancipation had just enlarged — and they were unenforceable within a decade. Ninety years later they were the ground on which the whole civil rights settlement was built. A guarantee is a standing option: unexercisable until somebody with force wants to exercise it, and impossible to exercise at all if it was never written.

That is the strongest argument available for writing things down, and it is not a sentimental one. It is a statement about optionality.

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PART SEVEN

THE HARDEST CASE

Vietnam is where the proposition comes closest to failing, and the honest thing is to let it force a qualifier rather than to explain it away.

At Điện Biên Phủ in 1954 a Vietnamese army decisively defeated a French one in a set-piece engagement. That is the ruled striking the decisive blow, in the hardest available form, against a European colonial power.

Three conditions had to hold first, and none of them was the population's own spontaneous strength.

The floor had already been cracked from outside — the Japanese dismantled French rule in a night in March 1945, and Hồ Chí Minh's own declaration said the independence had been wrested from the Japanese and not from the French. The metropolitan will had been emptying for eight years, in an empire that would not conscript its own citizens for the war. And a rival great power had armed the counter-elite to conventional parity, artillery included.

So the proposition survives with its qualifier intact, and the qualifier is where all the content is. The ruled do not beat an intact, backed floor. Every word matters: intact, and backed. The peasant with a bamboo spear did not beat the French army of 1885. An externally armed counter-elite beat a will-drained, unbacked garrison in 1954. The same people, the same coloniser, opposite outcomes, and the entire difference lies in three conditions outside the population.

And note what the blow actually did even so. It did not exhaust French capacity — France could have continued. It emptied the last of French will. Điện Biên Phủ was not the exception to the mechanism; it was the mechanism delivered in military form.

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PART EIGHT

WHAT AN ORDER DOES TO ITSELF

The corpus contains a pattern I did not expect and think is underweighted: orders frequently dismantle their own defenders shortly before they fall, for good reasons, at the hands of competent administrators trying to improve them.

The Bourbon reforms in Spanish America are the clearest instance. Within about thirty years the Crown abolished the office of corregidor, ended the reparto, suppressed the cacicazgos that two centuries of tribute had run through, stopped selling audiencia seats to creoles and reverted to peninsular appointment, and detached Upper Peru and its silver from Lima's merchants. Every one of those was defensible. Several raised revenue. Several reduced genuine abuses. Together they meant that when the metropolitan floor vanished in 1808 there were markedly fewer men whose own position depended on the arrangement continuing.

The mechanism is worth naming because it inverts the intuition. An arrangement is held up by the number of people who would be ruined by its collapse. Opposition to such an arrangement confirms everyone's stake in it — the attack reminds each beneficiary what he stands to lose. Reform of it removes stakes, one office at a time, with the best intentions, and each removal is individually justified.

So: a working default is more endangered by its own efficiency drives than by its enemies, and the warning sign is a reforming administration going through a chain of intermediaries and rationalising each link in turn. The Bourbons did not intend to unbind the empire. They intended to collect more, and they did.

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PART NINE

WHAT REPLACES IT

The last question the cases answer is what actually changes when an order ends, and the answer is generally less than anyone expected.

The controlling variable seems to be how much the incoming force resembles the outgoing one. Where an empire's centre is destroyed and its provinces fight each other into independence, the conquering armies share the old order's language, faith, law, property regime and personnel — and the sovereignty changes completely while the settlement barely moves. Peru's tribute outlived its viceroy by decades; the hacienda survived; slavery lasted to the 1850s; the men who ran the republic were the men who had run the viceroyalty minus the peninsulars.

Northern Nigeria reloaded comprehensively: the northern party inherited the Native Authority machinery, the army inherited the party's state, and the emirs stayed. The one hand that could check an emir changed from a Resident to a Premier to a Brigadier and remained one hand.

And the crack, when it opens, is entered by whoever is already organised — which the order has usually selected in advance. In Turkestan in 1917 the native counter-elite was the most impressive material in the region, with a programme, a press and a plan of representative government, and it was destroyed in three months by Russian railwaymen and soldiers, because the Jadids had a programme and the settlers had a soviet and rifles. A colonial order organises its own colonists in unions, garrisons and depots while systematically declining to organise the conquered, and thereby decides in advance which of its subject populations will inherit the gap.

The corollary for anyone reading a revolution: look at who was permitted to hold meetings for the previous thirty years. That is usually who wins.

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PART TEN

WHAT THIS IS NOT SAYING

Four things, because a structural reading of this material is very easily mistaken for a dismissal, and the mistake is worth heading off in the author's own words rather than leaving to the reader.

It is not saying the ruled are passive. The Andean who took his dead back out of the church, the Jamaican who timed a strike for crop time, the Mississippian who walked to work for 381 days, the Vietnamese who dragged artillery up a mountain — none of these is passivity, and several of them are among the more impressive things human beings have done.

It is not saying that changing the price is nothing. It is the only lever the governed reliably have, and it is a real one. Sharpe's rising is in the causal chain of abolition. Birmingham is in the causal chain of the Civil Rights Act. The FLN is in the causal chain of Evian. What the cases show is where that leverage sits — in the cost column, presented to a ledger-holder whose balance sheet the risers did not write — and that is a statement about mechanism, not about worth.

It is not saying courage is futile, but it is saying courage is not a mechanism. People have acted with enormous bravery against every order in this collection, and in most cases they were killed and nothing changed, because bravery becomes a lever only when it is attached to somebody's ledger. The difference between 1892 and 1963 is not that the people of 1963 were braver than Ida B. Wells. It is that by 1963 somebody existed for whom the bill, once presented, was worth paying. Recognising that requires the movement to have read its own position with precision — which the sentimental account, oddly, denies it. Randolph in 1941 knew exactly what a hundred thousand marchers would cost an administration arming for a war about tyranny, and named his price and took it. That is not a lesser achievement than moral witness. It is a harder one.

And it is not a counsel of despair, because the mechanism cuts both ways. If orders end when the ledger moves, then the ledger is the thing to work on — and the cases show it moving through franchise reform, through migration that builds a constituency somewhere the ruled *can* vote, through the acquisition of external audiences with claims, and through written guarantees that sit dormant for a century and then become the instrument. The Great Migration did more for the American settlement's eventual end than any rising in the South, because it moved several million people to places where their votes counted and thereby altered what a national party had to weigh. Nobody planned it. It was a few million individual decisions about wages, and it changed a national ledger.

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ESSAY

A CLOSING NOTE ON WHAT THIS METHOD CANNOT SEE

Two limits, stated plainly.

The first is that this reading is built from cases where the record survives, and the record survives disproportionately for orders that lasted. An order broken early by its own subjects would leave a thin file, and a method that mines thick files will under-count exactly the cases that would refute it. I do not think the effect is large enough to overturn the finding, because several thin-file cases are in the corpus and behave the same way, but the bias is real and should be held.

The second is that the ledger is a reconstruction. Nobody in these cases kept the account this paper attributes to them, and where a document does exist — the Cabinet paper on what each colony was worth, Grant's letter about the annual autumnal outbreaks, Acheson's letter about the day-to-day conduct of foreign relations — it is a piece of extraordinary luck rather than the normal state of the evidence. The mechanism is inferred from behaviour far more often than it is read from a page. That makes it a strong hypothesis rather than a demonstrated law, and the cases that would most sharpen it are the ones where an order's internal accounting survives in full.

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A note on sources. This paper is a synthesis of the change-and-collapse findings of the completed studies in the collection — French Algeria, British Buganda, French Vietnam, British Jamaica, British Northern Nigeria, Russian and Soviet Turkestan, Alexander and the Successors, the Viceroyalty of Peru, and the two American volumes — and adds no new primary research of its own. Every factual claim here is established, with its sources and its stated uncertainties, in the study it comes from; contested quantities named in passing above are given as ranges there and are not resolved. Where this paper departs from the collection's earlier framing — principally in organising the material around the two columns of a ledger rather than around a list of cracks, in adding franchise-replacement and audience-acquisition as distinct mechanisms, and in the claim about orders dismantling their own defenders — those are my own readings of the assembled cases and should be tested against the next ones rather than taken on authority. --- Part of the collection Patterns of Power. *Tested, never revealed.*